

Innovation in Body/ Mind Fitness: Integration of Somatic (Body-Centered) Therapy Practices Into Fitness for Optimal Health

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Abstract

Somatic Depth Psychologist, leading celebrity trainer, wellness innovator and Whole-Body Health Coach, Michael George Hofrath introduces a revelatory body/ mind program to the world of fitness. He integrates performance-based, functional movement fitness training technology with the latest in exercise science, neuroscience and somatic body-based psychotherapy practices for accelerated body transformation results. Connection with the body mind system leads to a truly holistic, lifestyle altering whole-body health transformation experience.

All bodily systems inclusive of the embodied psyche and soul are designed to function in harmonic partnership as a balanced system for optimal health. Lifestyle behavior, attitude, environment, belief systems, body-structure patterning, exercise and a healthy diet must all be aligned for the synergistic integration of the body mind system. Integration of somatic body-based practices into fitness regimes shifts the primary focus from solely a body-image perspective toward the development of a more conscious, body-awareness mentality. This shift in perspective connects us with the “wisdom of the body”, and bridges the gap between the (ego-based) conscious and the (psyche-soma) unconscious self.

Mindful awareness within movement-based exercise facilitates a synchronistic connection to the bodies “needs and wants” versus separation from body and/or coercion to transform the body with unrealistic goals or self-defeating body image demands. In making the body mind collaboration a primary objective we literally expedite all body-transformation goals including that of weight loss. Moreover we open the gate way to greater self-realization, balance and purpose in life and healthy lifestyle behavior modification.

Introduction

Our culture continues to live imprisoned within the conception that our body, mind and soul are distinctly separate entities. As such we place great value on body aesthetics over our embodied lived experience, or how we feel, in the body we wear every day. We are conditioned to view the body as other, separate from mind and soul. Body image remains our cultures mantra!

This viewpoint propagates a splitting off from soma, and a disconnection from psyche and soul. The greater disservice is in the cultural conditioning this illusive ideal has on the collective unconscious as a whole. Due to habitual conditioning we often fail to even recognize the barrage of body image related mass media commercialism or the use of sexual innuendos to sell everything from prescription drugs and beauty supplies to clothing brands and automobiles.

In the health and fitness field the term mind body connection is bandied about with reckless abandon. Often fitness experts and health professionals alike cannot offer a concrete, or definitive, definition regarding what the mind body connection is, or how facilitating this

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connection may offer innumerable benefits. Without context, or substance, the term mind body connection is rendered nothing more than a sales term.

As a Depth Psychologist, emphasis Somatic Studies, intuitive body mind healer and health & fitness expert, I pride myself on having a curious nature. I believe in asking the why questions. As such my focus with clients who wanted to lose weight, sculpt, tone or transform their body shifted from a concentration on body image to a more holistic and somatically integrative whole body mind soul approach. The results were nothing less than astounding in regards to the expediency of body transformations results.

I emphasize body-awareness, or how one feels in their body, over body aesthetics, as the more efficacious path for body mind transformation and healing.

A body image mentality greatly influences our perception of self and others. If someone is thin our perception is usually positive. If someone is heavy our perception is often negative. This influence also affects our inner self-talk. We typically believe our self-talk to be the truth because it comes from our own thoughts and we would never lie to ourselves right? Wrong!

Our ego-based brain was designed to protect us from harm, hence all the defensive mechanisms such as projection, rationalization, denial and redirection. Defensive mechanisms are extremely powerful protection tools. As such our brain often lies to us over hundred times per day. Rarely are we aware that we are lying to ourselves, because most people live a disconnected life. We live in the conscious realm from the neck-up and believe this to be the truth. This is a very self-involved, narcissistic perspective, as truth lives in the unconscious realm of psyche and soma.

Most academics, scientists and researchers will flatly discredit such an idea and rationalize this ideology through lack of evidence-based research. As this may be true in regards to the ideology of soul, it is only true because soul is indefinable, which most assuredly disqualifies soul from empirical, blind study evidence-based research potential. However, just because an idea cannot be quantified logically, or rationally, doesn't make the idea wrong.

Scientific research has a long-standing history of being incorrect, often even missing the boat completely. Remember when we used to think the world was flat, until an explorer named Christopher Columbus had the blasphemous idea that maybe the world was actually round. This was also during the time of the infamous inquisition, which made free thinking a crime punishable by death. I could continue on into modern times and infinitum and we would discover incalculable theories and research studies that have been proven incorrect.

The brain cannot distinguish the difference between a truth and a lie. The auditory system hears our self-talk and compartmentalizes our thoughts into a memory bank for later use. The next time we refer to ourselves as fat, ugly, dumb, unlovable, not enough, or not thin enough, the brain registers this thought as a previous truth. Then over years of habitual conditioning we believe these thoughts to be true.

Over time these ego-based lies morph into a huge matrix of limiting belief patterns, intertwined with embodied stories, that we live our lives by. We spend our lives regurgitating these stories over and over again to anyone who will listen or through our self-talk. We describe ourselves to others through this perspective to the point where we actually believe these stories to be true. Then we wonder why our culture lives in a constant state of perpetual depression and dissatisfaction with our bodies!

We value attainment of the "perfect body", and neglect development of deeper conscious body-awareness, or how we actually "feel in the body we wear everyday". This is a very limited, constricted ideology, and genetically unrealistic for the majority of the population. A central tenant of being "human" is the understanding that we are all imperfect, and flawed to some degree.

How we feel in our body, our embodied lived experience, has become lost in an alchemical void of mass media messaging through imagery that fills this space. Attainment of “the perfect body” has become its own embodied cultural construct. We expend a great deal of time, energy and thought serving this illusive master. In doing so we allow the pursuit of “body image” to become the root cause of much emotional pain and suffering.

Our psychological history is alive and present in everything we do. The way we organize, structure and process our experiences, which are then converted into memories, or more specifically, image based story's that provide meaning and structure to our lives and serve as our identity. This history is present in the way we move and in our movement patterns. It is present in where, how and why we hold tension in the body, which then dictates our breathing patterns and how restricted or unobstructed we breathe. It is present in our physical posture. How we move. How we carry our body and yes, how we feel in our body.

When we feel balanced, comfortable, light, peaceful or in a good mood it is because we are in alignment with our inner self at that moment. Alignment within self is the true essence of our soul, and should be the ultimate goal. Disease is imbalance in body, mind and soul, or in all three.

The body, mind and soul are intimately intertwined from the moment we are born until the moment we make our transition. Why then do we place so much focus on how the body looks, when the body is only one small piece of the puzzle? In truth we should be focusing on how we feel in the body we wear every day, because if our body feels good, most likely all systems are in alignment.

Now that we know the body operates as a system, and if transforming our body is the ultimate goal, then common sense would dictate we begin to look at all the psychological information within our mind and soul to better understand the motivations behind our adverse physiological behavior. If we begin to deal with all the root reasons why we submit to adverse physiological behavior maybe we can stop acting on this behavior and start to act on what makes us feel good wearing our body.

Connection with our body/ mind/ soul system is truly a holistic, lifestyle altering, whole body health transformation experience. All bodily systems inclusive of the embodied psyche and soul are designed to function in harmonic partnership as a balanced system for optimal health.

Lifestyle, personality, behavior, attitude, environment, belief systems, body-structure patterning, breathing patterns combined with physical exercise and a healthy diet must all be in alignment for synergistic function of all our bodily systems. The integration of somatic body-based practices in fitness regimes is just as important as actual exercise and a healthy diet.

When we shift our primary mental focus from an exclusive body-image perspective and choose to concentrate more on the development of a deeper conscious body-awareness perspective we facilitate a direct connection with our intuitive self. This intuition is our truth. Connection with our truth facilitates balance and alignment, which in turn allows us to access the one most important thing we all desire, which is happiness.

Do we feel better about ourselves when we look good? Often, we do, but we give the body too much credit. We have to ask ourselves do we feel good just because we look good, or are there other factors involved? Is this sense of feeling good constant or is it illusive? Is this sense of feeling good solely dependent upon our physical body not changing? What happens if we have a bad day at work, the doctor gives us bad news, a friend betrays us, or a lover deceives us? Does how our body looks in this moment going to matter then? Is it even a thought, highly improbable?

Does living in the world of body image as our self-esteem anchor provide us with a happy, joyous and free life? Not even close. How do you feel when you want a bowl of ice cream, or your favorite dessert after dinner, or even a few potatoes chips with your lunch? Do you allow yourself to eat these foods in moderation, or do you deprive yourself for the sake of your body image?

Do you allow yourself to eat any of the foods you enjoy in moderation without feeling guilty, or justifying this guilt by repeatedly telling yourself, and others, you shouldn't have eaten that? Continued deprivation and inner scolding do not support a happy, content life. Deprivation supports a state of constant dissatisfaction perpetuated by self imposed guilt and shame.

If we check-in with ourselves we usually do this through the conscious "ego mind", which rationalizes, conceptualizes, defends, denies, alters, and misinterprets events and situations. The "ego-mind" pushes the real truths deeper into the underworld of the body so we can just get on with our busy days. This way of living is unfulfilling and evokes the feeling that something is amiss.

Conclusion: Integration of Soma

The body never lies! In my own work I found a somatic approach guides clients to reconnect with soma and their intuition to discover hidden truths that help them to better understand why they feel a certain way in their body, mind and in their life. They also discover the root causes, or origin, behind adverse self-care behaviors, which do not support a healthy lifestyle or a fit body.

In learning how to be in relationship with our body, and emotions, we can connect with the deeper foundation of who we really are, which allows us to change negative thoughts, feelings and behaviors that are effecting our life adversely. In this way we learn to sense, through our body, the infallible truth of how we feel, and what we really want, and need out of life.

One must be willing to descend into the darkness of the underworld, to bridge the gap between the conscious and the unconscious, for a reconnection with soma. Doing so opens the proverbial gateway into the realm of psyche where we can find true meaning, purpose and understanding.

Development of conscious body awareness allows us to connect with soul and to become more of who we want to be, rather than more of who we do not want to be. True transformation takes place when we are connected to soma, fully engaged and present to our experiential felt sense and the embodied psyche.

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